

# Defence Reserves join forces with Elsie's River High School to celebrate the School's 60th Birthday

*Article and photos by Regine Lord*



Photo 1: The SA Army Band Cape Town leads the parade down Halt Street in Elsie's River

**Elsie's River High School**, situated on the corner of Avonwood Road and Halt Road, is celebrating its **60<sup>th</sup> Birthday in 2014** with a series of exciting events.

These include an athletics competition, a beauty competition, a school dance, a musical extravaganza, a karaoke evening, a special event involving the aged, several class reunions with ex-pupils, a golf day and dinner dance coming up in October, and a

memorial service in November.

One of the highlights for the year was the **Carnival Weekend of 26-27 September 2014**, at which the South African National Defence Force participated.

All these events are important fund-raising occasions for the school, which is located in an area that faces many social problems, such as crime, gangsterism, alcoholism, and drug abuse; pupils at the school are often exposed to violence and gang warfare in the surrounding neighbourhood.

The school thus places much emphasis on nurturing a sense of community in the neighbourhood, by involving community members, parents and ex-learners, many of whom have made a positive contribution within their own areas.



Photo 2: The Rooikat of Regiment Oranje Rivier leads the convoy of military vehicles

As part of the drive to improve discipline and teamwork, foster pride in the school, and inculcate positive values in the learners, a **Cadets Program** was initiated on 02 June 2012, with 60 cadets. Their head coach, Mr Anthony Marcus, is assisted by Mr Adrian Morris (manager) and two assistant coaches, Mr William Walters and Mr Michael van der Rheede.



Photo 3: The Elsies River High School Cadets, neatly attired in their school uniforms of grey pants, white shirts, and maroon vests and berets

They practice three times a week (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays), as well as throughout the June and September school holidays, and take part in many community events. They march at special events and school functions, such as soccer games, cricket matches, carnivals and funerals in the community. Mr Morris remarked that the instructors had watched numerous videos of marching drill squads around the world to gain inspiration and spark ideas of what routines they could implement.



Photo 4: The Cadets march proudly onto the school field, accompanied by much cheering from their supporters

Thanks to support from the City, the police and the military, with many individuals giving generously of their time to motivate and mentor the learners, the newly formed **Elsies River High School Cadets** have already been very successful.

Impressively, in their very first year, the cadets competed against 28 schools at the Western Cape Schools Marching and Drill Championships, held at Florida Park in Ravensmead in October 2012 – and won the honours of Western Province School Cadets.

Even though it was the first time the school had entered this competition, the squad came first in all the categories at the event. They similarly gained the overall highest points in their division at the 2013 Championships at Vygieskraal Stadium.



Photo 5: Drum Major WO1 André van Schalkwyk leads the SA Army Band Cape Town through their paces in front of an appreciative crowd of spectators

At the Cape Marching Drill SAPS Championships, which took place on 18 October 2014, at the Stephen Reagan Sports Ground in Park Avenue, Westridge, Mitchell's Plain, they won a runaway victory:

Competing against 10 high schools and two visiting schools, one from Beaufort West and one from Port Elizabeth, the Elsies River High School Cadets won 5 first prizes, 2 second prizes, and the prize of being the Western Cape Marching Drill SAPS Champions!

They will be representing the Western Cape in Port Elizabeth during the June holidays in 2015.

They were also privileged to perform during the Saturday afternoon matinee for the **Cape Town Military Tattoo 2013** at the Castle of Good Hope in November 2013 – for many of the excited learners, this had been their first visit to the Castle. During their fast-paced marching and drill routine, they displayed no nervousness at all, but dazzled all the spectators with their discipline, coordination and teamwork.

Numerous regiments and units of the **Defence Reserves** were part of the school's festivities:

- the Defence Reserves Provincial Office of the Western Cape,
- Fort iKapa,
- Cape Town Highlanders,
- Regiment Oranje Rivier,
- Regiment Westelike Provincie,
- 3 Medical Battalion Group,
- 4 Maintenance Unit,
- 30 Field Workshop,
- 71 Signal Unit,
- Area Military Health Unit Western Cape,
- Wynberg Military Police, and
- the Dog Unit of 505 Squadron of SA Air Force Base at Ysterplaat.



Photo 6: The Cape Town Highlanders demonstrate how to deploy a mortar to ensure perimeter protection

The intermittent showers of early Saturday morning did not dampen spirits in the slightest, and by late-morning, the skies were clearing with the promise of a pleasant spring day.

By 10h00, an impressive convoy of military vehicles had lined up in Halt Road, about a kilometre from the school. The SA Army Band Cape Town led the **Parade**, with the various regiments in their military vehicles following close behind. Behind the vehicles marched the Elsies River High School Cadets, following the musical beat of their marching band known as the Wise Men of the East, which brought up the rear.



Photo 7: Mock section attack by the Cape Town Highlanders, complete with billowing clouds of colourful smoke

All along the route, curious local residents emerged from their houses, and shop-owners and customers stood outside their shops, waving and cheering. The young cadets looked confident and proud, as they marched towards the school; some could not hide big smiles, when they were being cheered by family and friends, many of whom marched alongside the parade in a show of support.



Photo 8: The troops of the Cape Town Highlanders advance across the field

All manner of carnival rigs, such as a big wheel and various spinning carousels, were set up on the field; numerous stalls selling food and refreshments did a steady trade. And all the military vehicles that had participated in the parade, lined up on the far side of the field.

Many of the learners used the opportunity to climb into the various vehicles, interact with the soldiers, ask lots of questions, and pose for photos with the obliging troops. The tent with the weaponry

displays saw a steady stream of inquisitive visitors, as did the stand with the various

information brochures, where copies of SA Soldier and Reserve Force Volunteer magazines were distributed.

A programme of exciting demonstrations by the SANDF had been scheduled. First up were the SA Army Band Cape Town, looking splendid in their chilli-red uniforms; their music is always a crowd-pleaser, and their upbeat rhythms and well-rehearsed drills created a suitably festive vibe.



Photo 9: The Dog Unit of 505 Squadron of SA Air Force Base Ysterplaat demonstrate the skill and obedience of their well-trained canines

Thereafter, it was the turn of the **Cape Town Highlanders** to demonstrate how a mortar would be deployed to protect the perimeter of a military base. They followed this with a mock section attack, complete with the rat-tat-tat of automatic rifles and billowing clouds of colourful smoke, as the soldiers gradually advanced across the field. RSM MWO Alfie Wort and Lieutenant S.



Photo 10: The various regiments' military vehicles are lined up on the field, giving the learners an opportunity to interact with the soldiers

Abrahams on microphone provided a helpful commentary, describing what the men were doing and what the purpose of their various actions was.

The final demonstration involving the SANDF and showcasing their capabilities was by the always popular **Dog Unit of 505 Squadron**; they are tasked with protecting and safeguarding all personnel, buildings and equipment of SA Air Force Base Ysterplaat. The handlers showed

how well-trained and obedient the dogs are in tackling and bringing down attackers and intruders.

The parade and the various demonstration by the various SANDF regiments and units, as well as the professionalism and friendliness of the troops, had certainly made a positive impression on everyone who attended the event.

**We congratulate Elsie's River High School on their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and wish them and their excellent Cadets much success in the future.**